

a vessel having at least one bottom wall inclined downwardly from at least one sidewall [to an inlet for providing] toward a fluid inlet arranged to provide an upwardly directed stream of said fluid [capable of] for causing said objects to flow upward [to a disengaging position] from a feed position adjacent to said inlet [when a bed of said objects are moving downwardly along said bottom wall away from an upper portion thereof to said feed position and said flow of objects is being] to a disengaging position at which said objects are disengaged from said stream [at said disengaging position; and]

a distribution shield mounted in said vessel and having an upper surface inclined downwardly and extending away from the vicinity of said disengaging position to a return position [above the upper portion of said inclined bottom wall,] such that said disengaged objects fall on the upper surface of said distribution shield and move downwardly thereon away from said disengaging position to said return position, [from which they are deposited] said return position being arranged above an upper portion of said inclined bottom wall to deposit said disengaged objects onto the upper portion of said inclined bottom wall, and said inclined bottom wall being arranged to cause a bed of said deposited objects to move downward along said inclined bottom wall from the upper portion toward said feed position; and

a conduit mounted in said vessel and arranged above said fluid inlet for receiving said upward flow of objects, said conduit extending upwardly to confine the flow of said objects from the vicinity of said feed position to at least the vicinity of said distribution shield and being arranged to cause said upward flow of objects to pass through an opening in said distribution shield.

2. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim [2] 1, wherein said bottom wall has a conical shape and is substantially surrounded by said sidewall, and wherein an upper portion of said distribution shield is connected to an upper portion of said conduit.

3 A. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 1 for coating said objects with a metal, wherein said fluid is a liquid electrolyte comprising said metal and said objects are at least partially electrically conductive, and wherein said apparatus further comprises an electrode positioned to contact said moving bed and a counterelectrode [positioned above and in spaced relation to said moving bed] arranged to contact said fluid.

92 61. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 5, wherein said counterelectrode is positioned above said distribution shield, and wherein said apparatus further comprises [further comprising] a deflecting member mounted below said counterelectrode so as to intercept objects carried upward by currents of said fluid and deflect them away from said counterelectrode.

93 17 18. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a deflecting member mounted above said distribution shield and located in the vicinity of said [release] disengaging position so as to intercept said upwardly flowing objects and deflect them away from said fluid stream.

94 23. (Amended) An apparatus for electrolytically treating a plurality of objects with an electrolytic fluid while immersed in said fluid, said objects being at least partially electrically conductive and said apparatus comprising:

95 a vessel having at least one bottom wall inclined downwardly from at least one sidewall [to an inlet for providing] toward a fluid inlet arranged to provide an upwardly directed stream of said fluid [capable of] for causing said objects to flow upward [to a disengaging position] from a feed position adjacent to said inlet to a disengaging position at which said objects are disengaged from said stream and from which said disengaged objects are deposited on an upper portion of said bottom wall, said bottom

95 wall being arranged to cause [when] a bed of said objects [are moving] to move downwardly along said bottom wall away from [an] the upper portion thereof [to] toward said feed position [and said flow of objects is being disengaged from said stream at said disengaging position];

an electrode positioned to contact said moving bed and a counterelectrode positioned [above and in spaced relation to said moving bed] to contact said fluid;

pump means for conveying said fluid from a container to said vessel inlet;

control valve means for controlling the flow of fluid from said container to said vessel inlet; and

a frame for engaging said container and supporting thereon said vessel, said pump means and said valve means to provide a portable unit for transfer between a plurality of containers.

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96 24/21. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim <sup>23</sup>~~24~~ further comprising a deflecting member mounted above said distribution shield and located in the vicinity of said [release] disengaging position so as to intercept said upwardly flowing objects and deflect them away from said fluid stream.

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97 28/29. (Amended) An apparatus according to claim [28] <sup>22</sup>~~28~~ further comprising a deflecting member mounted below said counterelectrode so as to intercept objects carried upward by currents of said fluid and deflect them away from said counterelectrode.

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98 30/31. An apparatus for contacting a plurality of objects with a fluid, said apparatus comprising:

a vessel having at least one bottom wall inclined downwardly from at least one sidewall toward a fluid inlet arranged to provide an upwardly directed stream of said

fluid for causing said objects to flow upward from a feed position adjacent to said inlet to a disengaging position at which said objects are disengaged from said stream;

a distribution shield mounted in said vessel and having an upper surface inclined downwardly and extending away from the vicinity of said disengaging position to a return position such that said disengaged objects fall on the upper surface of said distribution shield and move downwardly thereon away from said disengaging position to said return position, said return position being arranged above an upper portion of said inclined bottom wall to deposit said disengaged objects onto the upper portion of said inclined bottom wall, and said inclined bottom wall being arranged to cause a bed of said deposited objects to move downward along said inclined bottom wall from the upper portion toward said feed position; and,

an electrode arranged to contact said moving bed and a counterelectrode arranged to contact said fluid, said fluid being a liquid electrolyte comprising a metal for coating said objects and said objects being at least partially electrically conductive.

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--32. An apparatus for contacting a plurality of objects with a fluid, said apparatus comprising:

a vessel having at least one bottom wall inclined downwardly from at least one sidewall toward a fluid inlet arranged to provide an upwardly directed stream of said fluid for causing said objects to flow upward to a disengaging position from a feed position adjacent to said inlet;

a deflecting member located in the vicinity of said disengaging position for intercepting and disengaging said upwardly flowing objects from said fluid stream; and,

a distribution shield mounted in said vessel and having an upper surface inclined downwardly and extending away from the vicinity of said disengaging position to a return position such that said disengaged objects fall on the upper surface of said distribution shield and move downwardly thereon away from said disengaging position to said return position, said return position being arranged above an upper portion of

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said inclined bottom wall to deposit said disengaged objects onto the upper portion of said inclined bottom wall, and said inclined bottom wall being arranged to cause a bed of said deposited objects to move downward along said inclined bottom wall from the upper portion toward said feed position.

### REMARKS

Independent claim 1 and claims 3-22 dependent thereon, independent claim 23 and claims 24-30 dependent thereon, independent claim 31, and independent claim 32, are now being prosecuted in this application. Each of these claims is believed to define an invention which is novel and unobvious over the prior art.

Claim 1 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by, or in the alternative under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as obvious from, the patent to Hough et al. (U.S. Patent No. 3,065,153). Claims 1 and 2 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as anticipated by the patent to Wurster et al. (U.S. Patent No. 3,241,520).

To the contrary, the applied references do not disclose or make obvious an apparatus for contacting objects with a fluid as claimed in the present application. For example, there is no teaching or suggestion whatsoever in Hough et al. and Wurster et al., whether considered alone or in combination, of such a contact apparatus wherein a distribution shield mounted in a fluid vessel has an upper surface inclined downwardly and extending away from the vicinity of a disengaging position to a return position such that objects disengaged from an upwardly flowing fluid stream fall on the upper surface of the distribution shield and move downwardly thereon away from the disengaging position to the return position, wherein the return position is arranged above an upper portion of an inclined bottom wall of the vessel to deposit the disengaged objects onto the upper portion of the bottom wall, wherein the bottom wall is arranged to cause a bed of the deposited objects to move downward along the bottom wall from the upper portion toward a feed position adjacent to a fluid inlet, and wherein a conduit is arranged above the fluid inlet for receiving an upward flow of the objects